



Billing Code 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 660

[Docket No. 120312182-2239-02]

RIN 0648-XC166

Fisheries Off West Coast States; Coastal Pelagic Species Fisheries; Closure

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is prohibiting directed fishing for Pacific sardine off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California. This action is necessary because the directed harvest allocation total for the second seasonal period (July 1 – September 14) is projected to be reached by the effective date of this rule. From the effective date of this rule until September 15, 2012, Pacific sardine may be harvested only as part of the live bait fishery or incidental to other fisheries; the incidental harvest of Pacific sardine is limited to 30-percent by weight of all fish per trip. Fishing vessels must be at shore and in the process of offloading at 12:01 am Pacific Daylight Time, August 23, 2012.

DATES: Effective 12:01 am Pacific Daylight Time (PDT) August 23, 2012, through 11:59 pm, September 14, 2012.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Joshua Lindsay, Southwest Region, NMFS, (562) 980-4034.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This document announces that based on the best available information recently obtained from the fishery and information on past effort, the directed fishing harvest allocation for the second allocation period (July 1 – September 14) will be reached and therefore directed fishing for Pacific sardine is being closed until September 15, 2012. Fishing vessels must be at shore and in the process of offloading at the time of closure. From 12:01 am, August 23, through September 14, 2012, Pacific sardine may be harvested only as part of the live bait fishery or incidental to other fisheries, with the incidental harvest of Pacific sardine limited to 30-percent by weight of all fish caught during a trip.

NMFS manages the Pacific sardine fishery in the U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the Pacific coast (California, Oregon, and Washington) in accordance with the Coastal Pelagic Species (CPS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Annual specifications published in the Federal Register establish the harvest guideline (HG) and allowable harvest levels for each Pacific sardine fishing season (January 1 - December 31). If during any of the seasonal allocation periods the applicable adjusted directed harvest allocation is projected to be taken only incidental harvest is allowed, and for the remainder of the period, any incidental Pacific sardine landings will be counted against that period's incidental set aside. In the event that an incidental set-aside is projected to be attained, all fisheries will be closed to the retention of Pacific sardine for the remainder of the period via appropriate rulemaking.

Under 50 CFR 660.509, if the total HG or these apportionment levels for Pacific sardine are reached at any time, NMFS is required to close the Pacific sardine fishery via appropriate rulemaking and it is to remain closed until it re-opens either per the allocation

scheme or the beginning of the next fishing season. In accordance with § 660.509 the Regional Administrator shall publish a notice in the Federal Register announcing the date of the closure of the directed fishery for Pacific sardine.

The above in-season harvest restrictions are not intended to affect the prosecution of the live bait portion of the Pacific sardine fishery.

Classification

This action is required by 50 CFR 660.509 and is exempt from Office of Management and Budget review under Executive Order 12866.

NMFS finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) for the closure of the directed harvest of Pacific sardine. For the reasons set forth below, notice and comment procedures are impracticable and contrary to the public interest. For the same reasons, NMFS also finds good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) to waive the 30-day delay in effectiveness for this action. This measure responds to the best available information and is necessary for the conservation and management of the Pacific sardine resource. A delay in effectiveness would cause the fishery to exceed the in-season harvest level. These seasonal harvest levels are important mechanisms in preventing overfishing and managing the fishery at optimum yield. The established directed and incidental harvest allocations are designed to allow fair and equitable opportunity to the resource by all sectors of the Pacific sardine fishery and to allow access to other profitable CPS fisheries, such as squid and Pacific mackerel.

Many of the same fishermen who harvest Pacific sardine rely on these other fisheries for a significant portion of their income.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.

Dated: August 17, 2012

Lindsay Fullenkamp,

Acting Deputy Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2012-20670 Filed 08/17/2012 at 4:15 pm; Publication Date: 08/23/2012]